

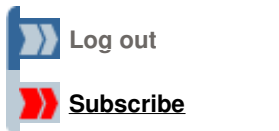


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#### REVIEW



#### CURSE OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER

Zhang Yimou's period epic is a meaty, blood-soaked melodrama filled with intrigue, deception and incest, says Mike



## SCREEN DAILY STORIES

✉ mail story to a friend

### ✉ Six-way co-production for Austrian *Headsman*

✉ Martin Blaney in Berlin

02 December 2004 04:00

As so often in the Austrian film scene, the idea for the medieval adventure story *Henker* (provisionally known in English as *The Headsman*) was born in a Vienna coffee house when screenwriter Susanne Freund pitched the story idea to producer Helmut Grasser of Allegro Film 4-5 years ago.

Once a treatment had been prepared, they started looking for a director and soon decided on Swiss-born Simon Aeby who had come to Grasser's attention after he saw his Max Ophuels Prize-winning English language picture *Three Below Zero*, starring Wes Bentley. "I liked the way he directs actors and his cinematographic style which gives a depth that one seldom sees in cinema these days", says Grasser

As Grasser admits, raising the film's Euros 5m budget for what became a six-country co-production was "a real challenge" and "an absolute struggle. It only functioned in the end because I had good partners in each country". He had previously worked with Germany's Peter Rommel on such features as *Drei Herren* and *Sie Haben Knut* and had looked at various projects with Switzerland's Marcel Hoehn of T&C Film in the past, which had however never materialised. Similarly, F&ME UK was brought onboard by Rommel who regularly works with F&ME's Mike Downey.

To round it off, the Hungarians [Peter Miskolczi's Eurofilm] joined the production when it was decided to base the interior studio work and outside sets in Hungary because of the ideal facilities at Mafilm studios and the existence of the new tax shelter model which can provide a refund of up to 20% of the production costs incurred in Hungary.

"At one point, Luxembourg had been mooted as a possible base for the studio shoot, but such a combination of Austria and Luxembourg would have been too expensive as they are both high cost countries", Grasser explains. "We would have had to construct everything, whereas at Mafilm there were a lot of existing sets [from such productions as *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame* and *A Christmas Carol*] on the lot outside of Budapest.

By good fortune, Luxembourg and Austria have a co-financing treaty which meant that Samsa Film could remain onboard without any

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REVIEW

**HAPPY FEET**

George Miller's over-ambitious penguin comedy feels like too many movies rolled into one, says Steven Rosen

ASIA IN FOCUS

**EYES ON THE PRIZE**

China's legit movie download and streaming services are growing fast.

REVIEW

**GOYA'S GHOSTS**

Javier Bardem delivers a riveting performance in Milos Forman's well crafted period drama, says Peter Besas

REVIEW

**TELL NO ONE**

Guillaume Canet's second feature is a slick and dynamic thriller, only spoiled by its over-convoluted plot, says Benny Crick

obligations to meet any 'economic effects'. Moreover, no "effects" were demanded from the public funds in Switzerland and Germany, the support for Henker being granted by MFG Baden-Wuerttemberg in return for the support granted two years ago by the Austrian Film Institute for *Sie Haben Knut*.

Allegro Film put up 60% of the budget, with 10% each coming from F&ME UK, Hungary's Eurofilm, Switzerland's T&C Film, and Samsa Film and Home Run Pictures together, and attracted an impressive patchwork of public and private financing sources ranging from the Austrian Film Institute, Vienna Film Fund and Austrian public broadcaster ORF and the regional fund Cine Styria (where the outside locations were shot in a nature reserve against an impressive Alpine backdrop) through the UK's Invicta Capital, Swiss Office for Culture (BKA), and Swiss broadcaster SF DRS, to the Luxembourg Film Fund and MFG Filmfoerderung Baden-Wuerttemberg. (An application to Eurimages, the Council of Europe's co-production fund was turned down)

"The financing structure in itself is sheer hell," Grasser says, pointing out that "it is really hard to make bigger films in Europe because the whole funding system isn't geared to that. That's the European problem. *Henker* is my declaration of belief in the kind of film which has been missing. I wanted to prove that it can be done."

The role of co-producer F&ME UK was, as Grasser explains, "quite different from other co-producers because they had a substantial creative input in addition to organising the sale and leaseback through Invicta."

Apart from bringing UK screenwriter Steve Attridge (*Guy X*) onboard to give a final polish to the English dialogues, F&ME also organised casting sessions in London for Aeby and Grasser.

Danish actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, who recently appeared in *Wimbledon*, plays the lead role of the headsmen opposite against such seasoned players as Steven Berkoff, John Shrapnel and Patrick Godfrey as well as such younger actors as Peter McDonald (*Felicia's Journey*), Anastasia Griffiths (*Alfie*), and Eddie Marsan (*Vera Drake*).

For full German, Austrian and Swiss production listings, click [here](#)

